

Thoughts on connecting and promoting natural areas in Burlington
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Consider this running/biking trip through Burlington: start at McNeil, head north through the Intervale, cross through vegetable farms and corn field, pass the Ethan Allen Homestead, over the 127 pedestrian bridge and into Ethan Allen Park, hazard a trip across North Avenue and down to the Elks Club. Travel through their parking lot, and along their land to the bike path. Travel south and turn into Rock Point, wind your way along the cliffs and back out to the bike path, then through the maze of homemade mtn bike trails on the Arms Grant to finish at the high school. Phew, you didn't get lost.

This (or variants of it) is a favorite trip of many citizens.

Along the way, the hiker may have visited beautiful wild spaces, public parks, productive gardens and farms, urban forest, vacant lots, or an historic cemetery. They will have traveled through rich and ecologically (and agriculturally) valuable river floodplain acreage. They may have seen globally rare plants. They will have traveled on wildlife corridors traveled by bobcat, moose, fox and mink.

But it is strictly a do-it-yourself operation of only those in the know. The course covers many land ownerships and managers including the Intervale Center, Winooski Valley Park District, Burlington Parks & Rec, Episcopal Diocese, BHS, Elks Club. There is no signage, map or connected trails.

The way citizens experience our city's natural areas—and their ecological connections—has nothing to do with landowner boundaries or political turf. And yet their management (and fate?) is often described and handled as if these boundaries were the driving reality.

Therefore, some questions to consider:

- How can we improve this situation, and others like it, on our wild and natural lands in the city?
- Can the conservation board help to shepherd management of this connected green asset--to make it not just connected in a haphazard manner, but formally connected for citizens by trails, signs, programs?
- Can we create a trail network between adjacent landowners to connect our already-connected wild and natural areas?
- Can we encourage more money toward trail improvements, trail reduction, programs to expand access, and signage?
- On the largest scale, how can we do a better job of celebrating and promoting and using our natural and wild areas?

“48 miles of trails is great but too bad they aren't connected. Can't get there from here!”
~comment from ward 6 resident at 2013 public meeting about open space in Burlington.